

Neuro-diverse athlete Sam Holness sees autism as his super power. Sam Holness and athletes Simone Biles and Jessica-Jane Applegate share what being an athlete and neuro-divergent means to them.

Sam Holness - Autism



Londoner Sam Holness is the first openly autistic triathlete to compete at the Ironman World Championships. Having started swimming aged three, Holness tried other sports including archery, judo and running before putting all his energy into triathlon, with a training schedule of 24 hours a week.

The 29-year-old completed his first full Ironman of a 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile cycle and marathon at the European Championship in Frankfurt in 2022. Sam's long-term goal is to become the first black professional triathlete with autism and encourage other people like him to believe the sport can be for them.

His coach is his father, Tony, who gave this interview to The Independent Newspaper "Part of the autism trait is to do repetitive things. As a boy he would

make a long line of trains, for example. What we've done is adapt that repetitive behaviour. Being an athlete is about repeating the right thing over and over again until you perfect it. We quickly learned that, if he's repeating things and learning, which is probably how most of us learn anyway, then we could channel that for him to have a really productive life. We never dreamed of this, we could not imagine it. Even for someone neurotypical you wouldn't imagine this for your child. I say to everybody he's my hero. As long as he's healthy, we think he's going to do great things. He's already doing great things. We're very proud of him".

Read more about this awesome athlete here.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/frankfurt-down-syndrome-asian-b2196947.html>

<https://www.menshealth.com/fitness/a41755358/sam-holness-triathlete/>

<https://www.tri247.com/triathlon-news/age-group/sam-holness-world-record-autistic-ironman-championship-kona>

Simone Biles - ADHD



One of the most well-known advocates for understanding neurodivergent conditions is Olympic gold medal winner Simone Biles. The USA gymnastics champion has ADHD and is a strong voice on the importance of mental health and wellbeing. Having won 25 World Championship medals, she is the most decorated gymnast in the history of the Gymnastic World Championships. In addition to her world medals, Simone has 4 Olympic Gold medals, 1 Silver and 2 Bronze. Making a total of 32 Olympic and World Championship medals and she is considered by many to be the greatest gymnast of all time.

Watch Simone being awesome
here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pg8ewr5ovQk>

Jessica-Jane Applegate - Autism



Jessica has 17 Gold Medals, 23 Silver Medals and 13 Bronze medals and has been awarded an MBE.

The Paralympic medal winner and British swimmer, Jessica-Jane Applegate, was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder at the age of 4. Jessica dealt with communication problems, OCD behaviour and various other traits associated with her condition, including difficulty with her memory. The swimmer revealed in her international paralympic committee biography, that swimming allowed her a feeling of peace, happiness, and normalcy, making it somewhere the athlete could escape to throughout her life.

Jessica is a massive advocate for the sports community to be inclusive across the board and she visited parliament to speak out on matters of neurodiversity and learning disabilities. She raised matters on the Commonwealth Games including men within the S14 disability being allowed to compete, whilst S14 women are not.

Her message to all neurodiverse women is “Nothing is easy, but if you really want something, don’t give up, and do not let others tell you that you can’t do it.”

Muhammad Ali



As a teen, world champion boxer Cassius Clay (aka Muhammed Ali) struggled with high school. "Many of my teachers labeled me dumb," he said. "I could barely read my textbooks." He was later found to be dyslexic.

- **Age:** Dec. at 74 (1942-2016)
- **Nationality:** United States of America
- **Birthplace:** Louisville, Kentucky, USA

Steve Redgrave



Olympic rower Steve Redgrave struggled with dyslexia when he was in school.

- **Age:** 61
- **Nationality:** United Kingdom
- **Birthplace:** Marlow, United Kingdom
- **Teams:** Great Britain men's Coxless Pair

Justil Gallegos, a Marathon Runner With Cerebral Palsy



Copyright: Runners World

Justin became famous when the [video](#) of Nike presenting him with a surprise contract racked up hundreds of thousands of views. It is fantastic, yet it wasn't easy at all.

When Justin started running, his feet kept turning inward, causing him to fall frequently. But his ambition, his drive, and a good coach together with a good routine helped him through. He graduated and joined the University of Oregon Running Club and went on to sign his 3 year contract with Nike.

On average, Justin ran 45 to 50 miles a week, with a long run and tempos of shorter intervals. He says cerebral palsy pushes him even further, to go beyond his goals and he feels he can be an inspiration to people everywhere with cp. One thing's for sure, he is one of the most vibrant and enthusiastic athletes with cerebral palsy and he shines through every single step.